

CHANGEZ' FALL OF AMERICAN DREAM WITH THE FALL OF WORLD TRADE CENTRE: RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST

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ABSTRACT

On August 14, 1947, the State of Pakistan came into existence as a result of continuous political movement waged for the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of Indian sub-continent. Though the creation of such a State has not been able to satisfy the political, moral and material aspirations of the Muslim community. And a different Pakistan was portrayed post 9/11.

South Asian diasporic fiction has been widely known for its representation of culturally hybrid characters that challenges fixed conception of ethnic and racial identity. One of the novels by Pakistani diasporic writer Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* deals with the image of south Asian identity following the events of 9/11.

The film adaptation with the same title was made by Mira Nair. It is a moving portrait of how a series of incidents, public perceptions and one's sense of identity can change a person. Set against the backdrop of a post-9/11 world, young Pakistani college student, Changez (Riz Ahmed), begins his new life in the US as a Princeton graduate quickly rising as a star on Wall Street. With a promising future ahead of him and a gorgeous artist girlfriend (Kate Hudson), Changez is well on his way to attain the American Dream when suddenly, with the fall of the towers, so unravels his identity and purpose. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is an inspired movie that portrays how easily perception, fear and suspicion can determine the lives and deaths of so many people, both innocent and guilty.

This paper tries to deal with the injustice of effects of 9/11 on the lives of main characters and the inability to continue privileged, mainstream American life, in context with *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the book by Mohsin Hamid and also with *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* a movie by Mira Nair.

KEYWORDS: Racial Identity, Effect 9/11, Injustice, American Life

INTRODUCTION

The events of 9/11 have been discussed in a surplus of different discourses, such as in the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, the films of Oliver Stone, the novels of Don DeLillo and of course the political speeches of George Bush. To this we can add Mohsin Hamid's 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' which examines the effect of 9/11 from a Pakistani, Muslim perspective and also the film adaptation with the same title by Mira Nair. The paper tries to explain the idea that 9/11 changed everything. The events of great importance for the world's development since 9/11 and have affected people in their everyday life.

THE CONCEPT OF CULTURAL HYBRIDITY

The concept of hybridity has gained consideration in recent years and various articulations of it have been widely employed to read South Asian diasporic writers, one of them is Mohsin Hamid. The basic concept of hybridity is Salman Rushdie's idea of cultural mixing which he referred in his essay "The Good Faith" as "Mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that" (Rushdie 1991, 394).

The concept of hybridity is important because it challenges the notion of an essentialized or sovereign subject and therefore, the foundational categories upon which various discourses of racism and ethno nationalism are founded. Moreover, because hybridity exposes cultures and identities as constructed rather than received, it enables identities to be re imagined and remade in new, empowering ways.

Roger Bromley's Narrative for A New Belonging says that diasporic writers have given voice to "postcolonial' forms of cultural and identities". (Bromley, 9) This fiction could be seen by Bromley as a "Liberal, multicultural space" that plays a crucial role in articulating "new senses of (un) belonging, re- drawing borders and remapping identities. (Bromley 6) Bromley argues that the "double sense of identity" implicit to diasporic narratives undermines traditional territorially – bounded models of cultural identity, which 'may be rendered existentially and analytically redundant' in our contemporary world. From this perspective, the Pakistani – American outlook of Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist might be seen as a harbinger of a new globalized novel that represents a "third space" of literary representation beyond traditional national categories (Bromley 6).

THE AMERICAN DREAM

Hamid's novel is distinguished by its portrayal of Changez's class of aspiration and inner struggle. His resentment is at least in part self – loathing, directed at the American he'd been on his way to becoming. For to be an American, he declares, is to view the world in a certain way – a perspective he absorbed in his eagerness to join the country's elite.

"This is a dream come true, Princeton inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible. I have access to this beautiful campus, I thought to professors who are titans in their fields and fellow students who are philosopher – kings in the making" (Hamid, 3).

Alluding to the American Dream, which is often promoted in and connected with Hollywood (movies), this statement of the narrator and protagonist Changez implies that from Changez' very arrival on, he was trapped in a life full of illusions, placing appearance over substance. It also alludes to the narrator taking different personae "At Princeton, I conducted my-self in public like a young prince, generous and carefree. Most people I met were taken in by my public persona" (Hamid, 11).

Though entering into Princeton was not the only dream, but being in Princeton made his American dream fulfilled, "Yes, it was exhilarating. That, in an admittedly long winded fashion, is how I think, looking back, about Princeton. Princeton made everything possible for me" (Hamid, 15).

"I...found myself wondering by what quirk of human history my companions – many of whom I would have regarded as upstairs in my own country, so devoid of refinement were they – were in position to conduct themselves in the world as though they were its ruling class" (Hamid 21). Changez, who comes from a high status but downwardly mobile

family, also aspires to join it. Given his oft-mentioned phenomenal aptitude for his new job and a talent for winning over other people, that goal all seems but guaranteed.

In movie it has been shown that the young financial wizard is charming, shrewd and intelligent, no doubt he could be successful at almost anything he put his mind to. When his boss asks him where he sees himself in ten years, he gives the expected answer 'a managing director with the firm'.

CHANGEZ AS TRAGIC MULATTO

The Tragic Mulatto is a stereotypical fictional character that appeared in American Literature during the nineteenth and twentieth century's, from the 1840s. The Tragic Mulatto is an archetypal mixed race person (a Mulatto), who is assumed to be sad or even suicidal, because they fail to completely fit in the "white world" or "the black world" As such tragic Mulatto is depicted as the victim of the society in society divided by race, where there is no place for one who is neither black nor white.

Frequently the tragic mulatto narrative revolves around the revelation of the protagonist's ambiguous background after previously "passing" within white society and the subsequent tragedy of he or she being rejected from it. A common objection to such a plot, as well as the convention in general, is that it allows readers to empathize and/or sympathize with the plight of oppressed or enslaved races but only through a veil of whiteness. In other words, instead of the tragic mulatto engendering emotional identification with a meaningful racial other, it is a figure that invites a white readership to sympathize with the character who is made to appear as white as possible.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist reworks the basic narrative convention of the tragic mulatto by centering upon Pakistani-American protagonist who are able to pass in mainstream pre-9/11 American society. Prior to 9/11, the protagonist Changez, lives a privileged life in Manhattan having graduated from American University and succeeded in getting jobs on Wall Street. New York City is, at this time of their life is a unequivocal source of celebration. "I felt bathed in a warm sense of accomplishment. Nothing troubled me; I was a young New Yorker with the city at my feet" (Hamid 45).

Hamid creates an effect by using 'fundamentalist' in the title – a word that is inextricably linked with Islam in western discourse – and then barely mentioning Islam at all throughout the novel. Therefore while Changez may be identified as a Muslim in post 9/11 America, Islam is ironically absent from his narration of life, political concerns and identity. In this regard this novel appears to disrupt American Stereotypes of Pakistani's as religion fanatics and question the idea of Islam as an important aspect of identity to many who are identified as "Muslims" by the US following 9/11.

In The Reluctant Fundamentalist Changez actually become aware of his position, "I was a modern day Janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war. Of course I was struggling! Of course I felt torn!" (Hamid 152) Changez identifies himself to have previously existed behind the global network of power through which America advances. Like the convention of the tragic mulatto, the pathos of the novel rests upon the injustice of Changez's inability to fit within this network of power in a post 9/11 America that rigidly and inaccurately defines Changez identity as "Muslim" threats to it.

THE FALL OF AMERICAN DREAM WITH THE FALL OF WORLD TRADE CENTRE

I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but news. I stared as one – and then the other – of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Centre collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased. (Hamid2008, 72) The same scene has been described in movie very beautifully.

Post 9/11 the protagonist is torn between his social identities.

“...the impending destruction of my personal American dreams. The power of my blinders shocks me, looking back – so stark in retrospect were the portents of coming disaster in the news, on the streets, and in the state of the woman I had become enormed” (Hamid 2008, 93).

“I found not just those daydreams but the woman herself vanishing before my eyes” (Hamid 2008, 104). There is no evidence in the novel to indicate that had 9/11 not occurred Changez would come to question his identity and the politics of the “American Empire” in the way he does. This aspect of the plot is crucial because it implies that Changez’ rejection of the ‘American empire’ is predicated upon his rejection by it. Therefore, while the novel cautions against what Hamid has describe in an interview with NPR as the US response to 9/11 creating “a kind of dangerous exclusion that leads people to feel like they have to choose one side or other”. (Hamid 2010). It also tacitly re- centers US global power by promoting Hamid’s idea that US should create “a kind of safe space” for pakistani’s “to be comfortable having American Cultural exposure, ‘while denying the possibility of legitimate dissent or “delinking” from the “American Empire””.

When we talk about film, it tries to explore another side of Pakistan – that of those who are against war and violence who want peace to prevail in the stifling society that they live in. It also shows the lifestyle of the elite in Pakistan – which is similar to any of ours in the sub continent, where the Muslim family drinks and enjoys qawali

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